

Coping with Anxiety and Panic

- Remember that the feelings are nothing more than an exaggeration of the normal bodily reactions to stress. It does not matter if you feel frightened, bewildered, unreal, or unsteady. You can develop the skills to handle these emotions effectively.
- These emotions are not in the least harmful or dangerous, just unpleasant. Nothing worse will happen.
- Stop adding to panic with frightening thoughts about what is happening and where it might lead.
- Notice what *is* really happening in your body right now, not what you fear might happen.
- Wait and give the fear time to pass. Do not fight it or run away from it. Just accept it. When you feel the panic mount, take a deep breath and, as you breathe out, let go. Try to make yourself as comfortable as possible without escaping. Just let your feelings come. You can do it.
- Notice that once you stop adding to the fear with frightening thoughts, the fear starts to fade by itself. Just accept what is happening to you. If you do this, what you fear most will not happen. Others have found their strength inside. You will too.
- Remember that the whole point of practice is to learn how to cope with fear without avoiding it. This is your opportunity to practice and make progress. You are in the situation!
- Think about the progress you have made so far, despite all the difficulties. Think how pleased you will be when you succeed this time. Even if you feel isolated in your fear, one of these days you will not feel that way. At some point, you will be able to go through the panic and say, "I did it."
- When you begin to feel better, look around you. Take in your surroundings. See the people around you. They are with you, not against you. Start to plan what to do next.

- When the panic subsides, let your body go loose, take a deep breath and go on with your day. When you are ready to go on, start off in an easy and relaxed way. There is no need for effort or hurry. Remember, each time you cope with anxiety and/or a panic attack, you reduce your fear.

Coping With Intense Anxiety and/or Panic Through Grounding Techniques

The following suggestions are referred to as “grounding strategies”.

1. Get out of the panic-provoking situation if you need to, and if possible.
2. BREATHE. Deep breaths through your nose increase the air flow to your lungs, and help reduce your heart rate and panic reaction. Exhale slowly through your mouth.
3. Do not try to control or fight your reactions. Accept them and “ride them out” reminding yourself that the panic is not dangerous and will pass.
4. Call someone and express your feelings to them.
5. Move around or engage in physical activity.
6. Focus on simple objects around you. Many people find it helpful to go through a sequence whereby they identify five things they can see, five things they can hear, five things they can smell, and continue through this process until the panic subsides.
7. Touch the floor, the physical objects around you, or “ground” yourself in some other way. For example, plant your feet on the floor, remind yourself of the current time and date, your age, etc.
8. If you are in a place where you can do so, discharge your tension by pounding your fists, venting your anger, or crying.
9. Breathe slowly and regularly through your nose to reduce possible hyperventilation.

10. Use positive self-talk and/or coping statements in conjunction with slow breathing.

11. Ask yourself, "What is the *most supportive* thing I could do for myself right now?"

Experiment with different coping strategies when you feel panic reactions progressing. Over time, you will learn which strategies work best for you.

Material Adapted by Suzanne Welstead at Counselling Services at the University of Guelph from *The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook* by Edmund Bourne and other resources (2008).